



TO: Olsi Vrapi, Attorney at Law

FROM: Mauricio Tohen, MD, DrPH, MBA
 Professor and Chairman
 Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
 University of New Mexico School of Medicine

DATE: August 9, 2019

RE: Urgent Need for Dr. Hammam Yahya:

The University of New Mexico School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, serves the population of the state of New Mexico through behavioral health clinics, psychiatric emergency services, and inpatient services at UNM Psychiatric Center (UNMPC) that offers general and specialized psychiatric care. UNMPC serves more than 60,000 patients from all over the state on an annual basis. The programs, particularly the inpatient units and emergency services, represent the safety net services for both the county and the state. There is a critical shortage of psychiatrists in the state of New Mexico, as well as nationally, and it is difficult for us to recruit enough psychiatrists to serve our population's needs. So with Dr. Hammam Yahya's delay in returning to his position as an inpatient attending psychiatrist at UNMPC, it exacerbates this shortage and makes it difficult to provide consistent care that patients in the state need.

On the inpatient service, Dr. Yahya treats patients with the most serious and debilitating mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, mood disorders, substance use disorders with co-occurring psychiatric disorders, and severe trauma disorders, all of which are difficult to treat. These patients suffer to such an extent that they are hospitalized because they represent a significant threat to their own life or to the lives of others. The department's need for help with this population is tremendous, given the departures of multiple longstanding psychiatrists in our adult psychiatry division. It is challenging to recruit psychiatrists willing to work on the inpatient service due to the difficulty with treating these complex patients. Working with this population requires a specific skill set that goes well beyond the ability of most general psychiatrists. In fact, few psychiatrists that we recruit have both the ability and desire to work on a locked inpatient unit.

Having someone with Dr. Yahya's skills, abilities and willingness to care for this patient population is of critical importance to the department and the people of New Mexico. Identifying faculty who are able to cover for Dr. Yahya during his absence is an enormous challenge, as we are already short-staffed and our existing faculty are stretched very thin. Furthermore, they lack the skill set of Dr. Yahya – many have not worked on an inpatient unit in decades.

At this point, I have now stepped in to provide coverage myself, which, in turn, impacts my ability to perform my administrative responsibilities in one of the largest departments

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in the UNM School of Medicine. Enlisting others to work in Dr. Yahya's place will require immediate and extensive training to work in this context, and will require cancellation of multiple outpatient clinics, where there are already large backlogs of patients waiting for appointments to see a psychiatrist.

Furthermore, Dr. Yahya works extensively with our psychiatry residents on the inpatient units. Our teaching mission is severely hampered without his skill set, as those who substitute in his place do not have the history of working on an inpatient psychiatric unit sufficient to provide much training to these residents. This requires a deep understanding of New Mexico laws and the mental health code, working with families of patients in psychiatric danger, and a thorough knowledge of medication dosing rarely used on a psychiatric inpatient unit. Furthermore, there are no Internal Medicine providers on this unit, and Dr. Yahya is one of only a few faculty with sufficient knowledge to recognize medical emergencies occurring in the psychiatric context. This includes such entities as cardiac and renal reactions to drugs and the presence of medically induced mental status changes.

Additionally, Dr. Yahya is responsible for working extra shifts to help cover the Psychiatric Emergency Service (PES) in the evenings and on weekends, as the department is required to provide 24/7 coverage at PES by attending psychiatrists. It is already difficult for our faculty psychiatrists to work their regular day shifts, and also provide coverage in the evenings and on weekends, so with Dr. Yahya's continued absence, this makes the struggle even greater. He has great expertise in this area as well, and those who work there must have sufficient knowledge and experience to work with our patients presenting with the very highest acuity.

Fatigue and burnout are big concerns for our psychiatrists. Work hours at UNMPC are very long and it is difficult for our psychiatrists to take leave for vacation or rest. Dr. Yahya's absence adds tremendously to this issue, and we are quite concerned that this will lead to further departures of other faculty members already working beyond what would be expected.

Thank you for your consideration in this manner, and for helping to get Dr. Yahya back to his clinical role as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mauricio Tohen'.

Mauricio Tohen, MD, DrPH, MBA
Professor and Chairman
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
University of New Mexico School of Medicine